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TWENTIETH CENTURY LYRICS. SCIENCE AND POETRY. LITERATURE CURRICULUM IV, TEACHER VERSION.

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THIS 10TH-GRADE CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR TEACHERS DEALT WITH (1) 20TH-CENTURY LYRIC POETRY AND (2) THE COMPARISON BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC AND POETIC WRITINGS. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS INCLUDING BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION, TEACHING METHODS, SUGGESTIONS, EXERCISES, AND COMPOSITION TOPICS WERE PRESENTED FOR BOTH PARTS. THE STUDENT VERSION IS ED 010 819. RELATED REPORTS ARE ED 010 129 THROUGH ED 010 160 AND ED 010 803 THROUGH ED 010 832. (GD)

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TWENTIETH CENTURY LYRICS.
SCIENCE AND POETRY.

Literature Curriculum IV
Teacher Version

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TWENTIETH CENTURY LYRIC POEMS

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TWENTIETH CENTURY LYRIC POEMS

Sometime before 1918 Ezra Pound, with one austere eye fixed upon the poetic practices of Tennyson and Swinburne, wrote that he believed "in technique as the test of a man's sincerity." He felt for instance that the metrical requirements of the old traditional forms often resulted in "shoveling in" words "to fill a metrical pattern or to complete the noise of a rhyme-sound" (note noise). He summarized his own technical intentions in such words as "definiteness" and "presentation"--"use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation"--and advised poets to "consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap."

This technical declaration of independence almost necessarily involved a new or at least revised view of poetic subject matter, succinctly summarized by Pound's fellow-worker William Carlos Williams in 1938: "--anything that the poet can lift from its dull bed by force of the imagination becomes his material. Anything." Emotion, Williams then continued, "clusters about common things, the pathetic often stimulates the imagination to new patterns"; and concluded:

> Times change and forms and their meanings alter. Thus new poems are necessary. Their forms must be discovered in the spoken, the living language of their day, or old forms, embodying exploded concepts, will tyrannize over the imagination, depriving us of its greatest benefits. In the forms of new poems will lie embedded the essences of future enlightenment.

Thus one important strain in twentieth century poetry tries to serve the purpose of "enlightenment" by transforming the commonplace "by force of the imagination," discovering the emotion that "clusters about common things" with the help of a language notable for its concreteness and a poetic line distinguished by its rhythmical austerity: its "sincerity." It is to make you see by "making it new," to paraphrase one of Pound's titles; as in Dr. Williams' "Red Wheelbarrow":*

(For text, see "Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams from The Collected Earlier Poems of William Carlos Williams; New Directions Book published by James Laughlin, New York, 1951; p. 277).

So much depends.

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*William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) was both a practicing physician (M. D. from University of Pennsylvania, graduate work in pediatrics) and a successful poet. He explains the combination by saying: "One feeds the other. . . Both seem necessary to me. One gets me out among the neighbors, the other permits me to express what I've been turning over in my mind as I go along."

"Poem"

by Kenneth O. Hanson*

(For poem, see San Francisco Review, No. 2, 1959.)

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*The work of Kenneth O. Hanson (who lives in Portland, Oregon, and teaches at Reed College) has been published in such magazines as The New Yorker, The San Francisco Review, Sewanee Review, and Poetry Northwest. Eighteen of his most recent poems appear in Five Poets of the Pacific Northwest (U. of Wash. Press, 1964). "Poem" and "Motorcyclists" are of earlier date.

What is there about these three seemingly so simple sentences that justifies the title, "Poem"? What does "Poem" make you see? How does it do its work?

It at first seems clear that "my grandmother's" pack rat compulsion to hang on indiscriminatingly to everything that comes her way is quite senseless, and her own defense of the habit in the last two sentences simply emphasizes it. Is it "wasteful" to throw away waste matter? --string and old wrapping paper may be put to some future use but surely not old peacock feathers and ancient garden hats ("from before she was married"--forty, fifty, years ago?). If you don't need something, how can it possibly be "handy to have"? All that junk in the attic! One can imagine the vast irritation of her children and grandchildren, whose logic has been unavailing against the old lady's stubborn illogic.

This is what "Poem" seems to say, and its technique, its shape, seems calculated to support it. In the first sentence that long list of the coordinate objects of the verb--string and paper and feathers and dolls and hats--is grammar's way of signalizing a failure of discrimination, while the long garrulous non-stop rush of that sentence seems to place, simply by grammatical contrast, an emphasis almost ruthless upon the two concluding short sentences in which the woman gives herself away in the very act of making her defense.

There is, however, an undercurrent of suggestion in the poem that runs counter to this view of "my grandmother," something in the treatment that makes her and her habit seem important and leaves us dissatisfied with our first reading. What is this "something" in the treatment?

First, concentration. To concentrate means to bring such a sharp focus upon a matter immediately before us (a book in our hands, theorem upon a page) that everything else that might compete for our attention is shut out; and concentration by excluding also magnifies. By concentrating upon the single trait here the poet magnifies it and seems to suggest that we are to see something in it not apparent to ordinary vision. The poet's glass.

Then: "My grandmother saved string." She is dead, and the grandson-persona's "Poem" must surely be intended as a memorial. Another clue, hint. We do not memorialize something that is simply petty, mean.

Third: the objects selected for attention and the way in which they are arranged in the presentation. The old wrapping paper is from Christmas presents; peacock feathers suggest the plumes of a lost beauty, the damaged dolls the children who have forever departed from the make-believe world into prosaic adulthood, the

dusty garden hats

from before she was married

the grandmother's own incredible girlhood. All these "useless" things are memory's symbols, making their frail stay against mortality. They *are* the grandmother. They are given their own kind of beauty by the poet's art, even the

/
dolls with pale
/ / / / /
china heads and one blue eye

which we have all known transformed into something strange and new by the shrewdly accented language. The first-sentence list can almost be taken as representing "my grandmother's" peculiar aesthetic feeling. The poem might have been called "Collector's Items."

What *now* of "It's a shame to be wasteful"? Seen in this way, such things are *not* waste matter, unless human life itself is. And what of her last statement? "Whether you need them or not" is obviously defensive--you do *not* need them in any utilitarian sense, and she knows it. They are simply "handy to have" because they are symbols of remembered beauty and Christmas joy, absolutely useless and absolutely precious. The colloquialism itself as an unconscious understatement makes an ironic emphasis that brings the poem's work to its low-keyed climax.

The danger in such a subject is sentimentality. It is avoided in this treatment by the poet's keeping himself out of it, letting the concrete nouns and adjectives and the protagonist's homely language generate the feeling. It is avoided by means of the wit that shaped that first long sentence with its madly heterogeneous burden of items." It is avoided by the verse technique itself, which eschews both regular metrical accent and rhyme, those devices of heavy emphasis.* The resulting tone is right. "Poem" is a poem.

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*For those interested in the purely technical: the line organization obeys the syllabic rather than the accentual principle, with all the lines but one measuring either six or seven syllables. The shrinkage to five in the third line from the end is compensated for by the only caesura in the poem. The poem has however a clear rhythmic movement, which should become apparent after two or three oral readings. The lines play against this real rhythm somewhat as the metrical organization in a traditional poem plays against the real rhythm.

"Motorcyclists"

by Kenneth O. Hanson

(For poem, see San Francisco Review, No. 2, 1959.)

In all good poems whether traditional or "modernist" the great effects are achieved through a sustained interplay between line and sentence and meter and rhythm. The situation in "Motorcyclists" is especially interesting--a highly sophisticated technique disguised as simplicity. It is a single *sentence*, but that unity is challenged by the fourteen *lines* of its progression. The line in turn is challenged, its integrity threatened, by the poet's making all but the last "run on," and, furthermore, breaking the backs of six of them with caesuras--

> How I envy the confident / easy performers,
> at home on the road, /
> who move as if daddy owned stock / in the company--

the poor line must struggle to keep its identity, but it *is* there. Line and clause and sentence, however, are actually working together in treasonable conspiracy against the authority of the English anapest, that most domineering of rhythms which held so much of Swinburne's poetry in bondage--

> ◡ ◡ / ◡ ◡ / ◡ ◡ / ◡ ◡ / ◡ ◡ / ◡ ◡ /
> "How I envy the confident easy performers at home on the road."

In conspiracy is strength. The anapestic authority is at least checked, countered, kept at a distance. This technical system of checks and balances provides much of the fun and wit of the poem. It has an analogy in what we hear going on in good jazz.

Yet the anapestic movement, however faintly heard because of the competition, seems functionally right for this poem about motorcyclists simply because its ta-ta-Ta ta-ta-Ta conveys a sense of speed, one supposes because it doubles the number of unaccented syllables found in the iambic line, and so seems to approximate the staccato of the exhaust pipe. And how are the riders of the machines, the motorcycle toughs themselves, seen, presented? If the subject is *supported* by the verse technique, how does the language *define* it and create a feeling around it?

The organizing *idea* is established in the second line in the word "performers." The motorcyclist goes in costume (although the poem selects only his boots for attention), the roar of the machine announces his entrance, he lives for show-off, for careless swagger ("never at a loss"), and he knows it, his "part and the name of the play," which is melodramatically dangerous; and even in sprawling death (dies with his boots on, Gary-Cooper-like) he remains true to his part, true to the role's traits (a flat character): confidence, ease, carelessness. Actor.

But note the syntax. The observer-poet, "I," is the subject of the sentence's main clause, and the verb--"How I *envy*"--at once defines the attitude toward the subject and establishes the persona as a character in his own poetic drama, providing it by implication with a psychological conflict. The poet of course wisely shifts attention, ostensibly at least, immediately from his speaker to the "performers"; everything that follows envy's direct object is modifier of that object, but the function of all of it is to explain why the performers are envied. It is because these actors are "at home" in their world, they are the rulers ("as if daddy owned stock in the company"), the power boys (although dead in the end), without self-doubt, suffering (as it seems) from no inner division, all of a piece. The traits, then, of the motorcyclists selected for attention tell us everything about the persona: thinker envies doer, the divided man the undivided. Hamlet at the recitation of "Aeneas' tale to Dido." Round character.

But the persona is a wry not a tragic Hamlet, and the poet behind the persona gives him his manner of utterance, his colloquial wit ("as if daddy owned stock," "arms and legs every which way") that tells us he is sane not sick and knows as well as we do that those guys on the bikes are thugs.

"Traveling Through the Dark"

by William Stafford*

(For poem, see Traveling Through the Dark; Harper & Row, New York, 1962; p. 11.)

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*William Stafford, who lives in Lake Oswego, Oregon, and teaches at Lewis and Clark College, has published two volumes of verse, West of Your City and Traveling Through the Dark. The title poem of the latter is reprinted in Five Poets of the Pacific Northwest.

Modern poets, having like all writers human concerns at heart, have necessarily tried to define and show forth the results for the human spirit of the massive urbanization and mechanization of modern life. The city has seemed destructive of traditional patterns of human relationship, has seemed to make the idea of community nearly impossible; while the machine, supposedly built for man's convenience, is fearful in its power to destroy life. Both cut man off from the world of nature, in which lie our biological roots. The denaturalization of modern man is one aspect of the dehumanization that threatens him.

The earlier poetry of our century that seemed most clearly "modern" tended to be urban and social in emphasis--Eliot's "Prufrock" (first version written perhaps as early as 1911) and "The Waste Land" are famous examples. If their work was to have relevance poets had to confront imaginatively the unpoetic city. The technical revolt against the euphonious rhythms of the nineteenth century (so unsuited to the harsh discords of an industrialized world) was paralleled in the work of these poets by a rejection of Nature as a significant subject (the hydroelectric dam stopped the babbling of Tennyson's Brook).

But things continue to change. In one of William Stafford's poems his protagonist says, "I learn from the land." Frost of course might have said it, and he and perhaps Robinson Jeffers may stand as stubborn reminders that the urbanites did not quite have everything their own way. But many of the younger poets are now making a return to the old subject with what may be felt as a new sense of urgency. It is a return to learn, possibly to rediscover the natural sources of our being and so to rehumanize modern man. Such poets go to the "land" almost as investigators, poetic empiricists, but carrying with them, even though they know (as of course Wordsworth did) that nature is in man as well as around him, a tragic sense of their own alienation.

"Traveling Through the Dark" means driving a car at night along a narrow mountain road, and it means moving through the imponderable dark of life itself.

It is important to recognize that "symbolism" is not something laid on experience. If the data of experience are simply contemplated, closely, directly, honestly, they can be trusted almost of themselves to yield the symbolic harvest of meaning. Present, Pound commanded. "Go in fear of abstractions."

A man driving a car along a canyon road at night sees a dark "heap" at the edge of the road, a danger to motorists, who, swerving at too high speeds, might be killed. He parks beyond the shape, returns, finds a recently killed doe (motorist kills doe, doe may kill motorist) pregnant with the fawn still alive but of course doomed. The tail-light, pointing backward, faintly illuminates the victim, but the significant discovery is made through the touch of the fingers. At the front of the car the lowered parking lights point ahead to the obscure destination: where one must go. Under the hood the mechanical purr of internal combustion ("steady," though, of course). The warm exhaust turns red, color of danger. They make a group: doe; fawn; car; protagonist. "Our group" (more than the four?). Around it the man can hear the wilderness listen, waiting for the decision, wilderness and man at one in suspense. "I thought hard for us all"--for doe, fawn, car, protagonist, wilderness; yet for all of us? Now there is a different kind of swerving: hesitation of the spirit, shaken, of the mind before decision. But there is no alternative really--so, "pushed her over the edge into the river."

Is the machine evil because it kills life, stops birth? The poet doesn't say so, going in fear of abstractions. It is the way things are. But he has had, swerving, his moment of awareness. Contact has at least been made, the still-warm body of the animal touched by human fingers, the flesh then sent down into the river.

A kind of ritual, formalized by the pentameter quatrains, brought to firm conclusion by the sonnet-like though unrhymed couplet. The language throughout is controlled by the simple purpose of concrete realization, the poet content to let meaning emerge through suggestion. Road, car, deer, canyon, river--all contain within themselves meanings that extend beyond themselves. "Swerving at the start, "swerving" at the end, frame the experience, show the progress of discovery. The poem is complete, even though nothing else may be.

CASEY AT THE BAT

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the Mudville nine that day;
The score stood two to four, with but an inning left to play.
So, when Cooney died at second, and Burrows did the same,
A sickly silence fell upon the patrons of the game.

A straggling few got up to go, leaving there the rest,
With that hope that springs eternal within the human breast,
For they thought, "If only Casey could get a whack at that,"
They'd put up even money now, with Casey at the bat.

But Flynn preceded Casey, and likewise so did Blake,
And the former was a puddin', and the latter was a fake,
So on that stricken multitude the deathlike silence sat,
For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a "single," to the wonderment of all,
And the much-despised Blakey "tore the cover off the ball."
And when the dust had lifted and they saw what had occurred,
There was Blakey safe at second, and Flynn a-huggin' third.

Then from the gladdened multitude went up a joyous yell,
It rumbled in the mountaintops, it rattled in the dell;
It struck upon the hillside and rebounded on the flat;
For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place;
There was pride in Casey's bearing, and a smile on Casey's face.
And, when, responding to the cheers, he lightly doffed his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt,
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;
Then while the New York pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance gleamed in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

And now the leather-covered sphere came whirling through the air,
And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped--
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one!" the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm-waves on a stern and distant shore.
"Kill him! Kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand.
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised a hand.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage shone;
He stilled the rising tumult; he bade the game go on;
He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew;
But Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said: "Strike two!"

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and the echo answered "Fraud!"
But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed.
They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
And they knew that Casey wouldn't let that ball go by again.

The sneer is gone from Casey's lip, his teeth are clenched in hate;
He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate.
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Ah, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright;
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light.
And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout:
But there is no joy in Mudville--mighty Casey has struck out.

--E. L. Thayer *

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*E. L. Thayer (1863-1940) was born in Massachusetts and educated at Harvard. He was a newspaper reporter and edited The Harvard Lampoon. Many of his humorous poems and ballads were published in newspapers, but no others ever achieved the popularity of his "Casey at the Bat" which became a favorite recitation of actors and vaudeville performers and was heard in theatres all across our country for many years.

It is not necessary to use the word "classic" too austerely, and it is occasionally salutary to remind ourselves that culture-snobbery sterilizes. Popular art has its own authentic classics that survive the critic's sneer. "Casey at the Bat" is such a classic.

It is of course narrative and as such may seem a sport among our lyrics. Sport, however, is the point. All nations have their games, and they profoundly express and help to define national cultures. The game itself is a kind of art with its fixed rules and exacting discipline, and the audience makes it theater. Games produce local and national heroes and develop their mythologies, and feeling, even passion, attaches to them. They are given epic treatment in the Iliad and Odyssey and even the fallen angels in Milton's Hell "in swift race contend." "Casey at the Bat" may yet achieve respectability.

Several of our lyrics deal seriously with established American sports with subtle and even delicate effects ("Cobb Would Have Caught It," "Ex-Basketball Player," "Motorcyclists," "Salmon Fishing"): all "for fit audience" though perhaps few. "Casey" is here to serve as a kind of happily vulgar counterpoise, a democratic authorization of the subject.

"Casey" needs no introduction. It is good because it pretends to be nothing more than what it is: an American mock-heroic, with only the difference that the mocking style derives not from heroic epic but from cliché ("the hope that springs eternal")--although there is that one thumping excursion into epic simile ("Like the beating of the storm waves . . ."). The meter is cliché, those wonderful hopping heptameters. And the story situation itself is triumphantly cliché: eighth inning, Mudville losing, two out, tying runs on base, a homer will win it: hero needed. Hero available. Ajax as Casey, the show-off, actor ("Defiance glanced in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip"). Bloodthirsty crowd, the "maddened thousands": Roman Colosseum. Crisis: two on, two out, strike two. But only the air shattered by the third strike. There goes your old ballgame.

"Casey at the Bat" is the poor man's "Rape of the Lock."

It also was seminal, inspiring imitation: James Wilson's "Casey's Revenge," S. P. McDonald's "Casey--Twenty Years Later."

"Cobb Would Have Caught It"

by Robert Fitzgerald*

(For text of poem, see A Wreath for the Sea; distributed by New Directions, 1943.)

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*Robert Fitzgerald (1910-) was born in New York State and was educated in England and at Harvard. He worked as a newspaper reporter and magazine writer and was commissioned a naval officer during World War II. Since 1949 he has taught in several American Universities. He has been awarded a number of honors for his poetry and his translations of Greek literature.

In spite of football's challenge to its pre-eminence, baseball is still *the* great American game. On spring and summer afternoons (and now, nights) across and up and down the land, the crack of the bat and the smack of the ball into leather is heard on small-town pasture diamonds (those old gunnysack bases!), in city parks where Little Leaguers "deploy" themselves in the familiar symmetrical patterns, in high school and college stadiums and the great big-league fields. It is very important; it deserves attention; even aesthetic attention. Among other things it satisfies, like all great sports, the visual sense: the geometrical precision of diamond with its long extensions of the white foul lines, the soaring curve of the outfield fly followed in quick contrast by line drive or grounder, the slow deliberate preparation for the pitch followed by the swift movements of base-runner and fielders--it all appeals first to the eye; and what an *educated* eye the ball-park eye is! These Sunday afternoons provide an ideal audience-performer situation: the performer sternly trained, disciplined, the audience highly knowledgeable--nearly all the males in it bring to the experience the technical expertise that can come only from learning the game at first hand. The sports page furnishes the text (sportswriters have written perhaps the most vivid prose to be found in the American newspaper): the history and critical principles of the game, which has its fixed traditions and its Hall of Fame where members of the cult may genuflect before effigies of the great heroes--the Ty Cobbs and Babe Ruths and Bob Fellers and all the rest of them, secure forever in a kind of Olympian grandeur. Little wonder, then, that the classical scholar-translator of the Greek epics Robert Fitzgerald should have found the game a subject worthy of his poetic talent.

The general strategy and organization of "Cobb Would Have Caught It" are simple enough. The plural nouns (parks, Sundays) of the first line announce the generalizing intention of the first 3-line verse paragraph--a vision of the game's afternoon ubiquity. This game is everywhere at once. "Talk it up, boys, a little practice" effects the transition--which had to be swiftly made if the poet was to hold our attention--to a particular game and the two particular plays (whether consecutive or even in the same inning or not we do not know) of the third and fourth verse paragraphs: the throw-out at first (*Smack*) and then the three-bagger with the runner brought up at third by the "long peg home": grounder followed by fly, straight line countered by the curve. Then the dying fall of the fifth paragraph, beginning with a return to the generalizing plurals of the first line (farewell to *all* the games of our past) and ending with the terse sensuous evocations ("Cool reek of the field. Reek of companions."). "Field" is Nature, "companions" the human society of the game. The personal feeling of the poem is of course nostalgia.

The idiomatic ease, "naturalness," of the poem's diction and phrasing may on first reading conceal from us the fact that the metrical situation is highly formal, as befits the ritualistic quality of game and crowd behavior (rules give the game a form nearly as precise as that of the Mass and the cries of the crowd--"attyoldboy"--are perfectly traditional formulations). Each line is four-beat, the tetrameter emphasized by end-stops in all but five of the poem's twenty-five lines. The bold iambic pattern of the first line--

"Ĭn súnbŭrnt párks whĕre Súndăys líe"--

quickly gives way to the "falling rhythms" of trochee and dactyl:

"Téams ĭn gréy dĕplóy thrŏugh súnlĭght"

"Cómĭng ĭn stúby̆ ănd fást, thĕ básemăn
Gáthĕrs ă gróundĕr ĭn fát gre̋en gráss"

Iambic variations of course continue through the poem, most frequently appearing in the second half of the line. An obvious but interesting point can be made about this rhythmic scheme: it is that in English the 3-syllable foot (anapest or dactyl) is always more obtrusive--more authoritative one might say--than the 2-syllable foot (iamb, trochee), so that here we cannot but feel that the dactyllic movement is dominant, in a sense muffling the iambs. Dactyl and anapest are also probably felt as faster-paced than iamb and trochee, one supposes because they provide a greater number of short and unaccented syllables which move by so swiftly. This metrical speed is appropriately most apparent in the two action paragraphs. There is a marked slowing of pace at the end when it is all over, the time of let-down. Then enters, with delicate emphasis, the meditative mood, the nostalgic element:

"Innings and afternoons. Fly lost in sunset [Cobb would have
caught it in spite of the sun] .

Throwing arm gone bad. There's your old ballgame.

Cool reek of the field. Reek of companions."

The slowing effect is secured by the strong period-marked caesuras and a movement toward the spondee--"góne bád"--"báll gáme". The poem's rhythms are at once sophisticated and simple in their tactics and effect: simple enough surely to make an occasion for some study of the ways in which poets use metric to match and support the action and changing moods of a poem.

The poem has a "persona," a speaker, who is characterized by his diction, his imagery, his imagination. Diction-imagery is marked by what may be a peculiarly American mixture of the aristocratic and democratic principles as they show themselves in these matters (the American intellectual often "talks tough"--sometimes, although not always, it is a natural inheritance which he allows himself to use with all due forethought). The "aristocratic-poetic" is exemplified in the opening metaphor of Sundays "lying" in sunburnt parks (prose equivalent: "In ballparks on Sunday afternoons . . ."); in the image of teams "deploying," like troops, through sunlight; in the grounder picked "stinging and clipped as wit"--a phrase that, with its literary evocation of metaphysical images and Pope's and Byron's couplets, would be meaningless to the baseball demos; in the word "casque" used for catcher's mask, in the jingle of the double-dactyl "shivery hickory," etc.

Such "poetizing," however, is kept close to the earth of the game and its special language, the technical point clearly made by the "socko, baby" that brings down shivery hickory. "Talk it up, boys." "Wings it deadeye down to first." "Oh, attaboy, attyoldboy" (the folk poetic instinct was at work in the reduction of "that's the old boy" to its euphonious equivalent). From this combination of "discordant elements" in the persona's style issues the poem's peculiar tone, to arrive finally at the nostalgia at the end.

"Cool reek of the field. Reek of companions." Emotion recollected in tranquillity, with a hint of the romantic's longing for some lost innocence. "Cobb Would Have Caught It" (Cobb almost a legendary giant of an American past that was surely simpler than the present) is an American pastoral poem.

"Ex-Basketball Player"

by John Updike *

(For poem, see The Carpentered Hen by John Updike; Harper & Brothers, New York, 1958; pp. 2-3)

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* John Updike (1932-) was born in Pennsylvania, graduated from Harvard and began his career writing for The New Yorker magazine. He is an accomplished novelist (The Centaur won a National Book Award in 1964): he writes short stories; and he is a frequent contributor of light verse to magazines. His poems can be found in The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures, Hoping for a Hoopoe, and Telephone Poles and Other Poems.

John Updike is better known as a novelist than as a poet and "Ex-Basketball Player" is a novelist's poem. The first stanza is in the manner of Sinclair Lewis describing Gopher Prairie: the town is mapped, it is specific, "realistic." Berth's greasemonkey Flick, an ordinary guy, is a realist's hero. (Can students make a short story of it? Let them try.)

But of course it is a poem, and the poem's feeling is not the same as the feeling of fiction. How does a poem feel?

The versification is traditional: blank verse lyric in five stanzas or verse paragraphs. No other English meter can be so easily made to approximate the "natural" pace of prose--"Pearl Avenue runs past the high school lot"--and language and statement in the first stanza serve prosaic purposes. Fact. This is the town.

The poetic transformation begins in the second stanza. Flick stands tall, ex-hero, among the "idiot tanks" imaged as basketball teams, "five on a side," hose "elbows hanging loose and low."* The personification of the machines is of course ironic. Only Flick is vital, "tall."

There are two languages, then, in the poem, that are played off against each other, and their contrast makes a tension: "poetic" language of stanza two countering prosaic language of stanza one. The tension is felt again in the third stanza. "He was good; in fact, the best." The memory of Flick's (flick of the ball) great skill and grace on the floor then gives rise to the feeling of "The ball loved Flick" and "His hands were like wild birds," the romantic flight image playing against the prosaic context. Here, at the end of the third stanza, the poetic climax is reached. There is an immediate decline back down into prose, with one last stirring of the dying poetic in the observation that, although Flick's hands are "fine and nervous on the lug wrench, / It makes no difference to the lug wrench." The basketball, pneumatic, came alive in Flick's hands, loved Flick. Not so the indifferent steel tool of Flick the greasemonkey, who ends cut off from communication even with Mae the waitress, staring at the only audience left him, the "bright applauding tiers / Of Necco Wafers, Nibs, and Juju Beads."

The treatment of Flick by the poet carries him a little way past pathos (just skirting the treacherous shores of sentimentality) at least toward tragedy (minor); a familiar American figure, the athlete limelighted in youth, achieving by his disciplined skill a kind of greatness--then quickly out of it, even though "most of us remember anyway." Never learned a trade, learned only the secret of the arc into the basket. Survives, though, still "kind of coiled" (the old athlete's tension, the energy held in reserve), and preferring self-mockery to self-pity (sometimes "As a gag, he dribbles an inner tube").

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* "Bubble-head" refers to the round glass tanks that topped the old gasoline pumps. The fuel was pumped up into them by hand, churning and bubbling, then went down into the customer's tank by gravity flow. Marks on the glass indicated number of gallons. Nearly everything was more interesting in those days.

"Esso" might account for the alphabet letters, but not very satisfactorily. Any other suggestions?

The iambic lines, the idiomatic ease of the language, the self-contained uniform stanzas, the poem's saturation with contemporary Americana, the felt presence, realization, of Flick, and the irony perhaps no more obvious than it should be (given the way things are), all work together to bring it off. Something that demanded a poem. American gamesmanship.

"Salmon-Fishing"

by Robinson Jeffers*

(For poem, see The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers; Random House, New York, 1938; p. 81)

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*Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) searched hard for a career before deciding to write. His education included graduate work in English, three years medical study and a year of work in forestry. He settled in Carmel, California, where he built his huge stone house with his own hands. His interests included, he once said, "Stone masonry, tree-planting, swimming, pipe-smoking, drives and walks in the Coast Range, reverent admiration of hawks, herons and pelicans. . .running, wrestling . . .an almost perfect inability to write a letter or kill an animal, love of monotony and wet weather."

In creating an intellectual setting in which to study William Stafford's poem, "Traveling Through the Dark," we referred to Robinson Jeffers and Frost as poets who continued to walk the path instead of the pavement in an industrialized world. They are, however, as different in outlook as two poets could possibly be. Whereas Frost in his New England farmland was always profoundly social (though apart), always believed there were human "promises to keep," Jeffers in his stone tower on the California coast held that "Humanity is the mold to break away from, the atom to be split." Frost accepted violence and death as inescapable elements in the human (and natural) condition, but in him they inspired pity and a deeper human love ("Out, Out--", "The Death of the Hired Man"); whereas in Jeffers violence at times appears almost as a value to be celebrated and certainly as the primary characteristic of all organic life. Whereas Frost was a humanist and believed in the saving power of mind, Jeffers seems to have believed only in power. His rejection of modern civilization was savage in a way that the Christian T. S. Eliot's could not have been: man was beyond saving, either by Grace of God or grace of socialism. The "Tower" of human life was "Beyond Tragedy." Jeffers' "path" was of granite, harder than cement.

These attitudes emerge from his work as a whole, and could not be deduced from many of his shorter lyrics read separately. "Salmon Fishing" (1924), for instance, contains a kind of grand pity for both fish and man, although obviously more pity for the salmon than for his enemy, who though "pitiful" is also "cruel" and "primeval," the comparison with the Stonehenge priests drawing upon the hypothesis that the famous great stone circle was designed as an arena for the ritual of human sacrifice. Sports (treated somewhat differently by Fitzgerald and John Updike) do have a ritualistic quality (see Hemingway's Death in the Afternoon) and so the simile seems apt. The stubborn undeviating spawning habits of the Pacific Coast salmon must always suggest mystery and inspire awe: the fish following so rigidly the seasonal rhythm in the freshwater birth, the salt-water migration in adulthood, then the fall return to the single spawning and death. Here too, then, is the hint of ritualistic sacrifice. But that death is a meaningful sacrifice in the interest of new life. Death on the hook is not. This is the central point of "Salmon Fishing" (relating it thematically to the death of Mr. Stafford's pregnant deer). The poem then appears as somewhat uncharacteristic of Jeffers' prevailing temper: the birth into life is good. The anglers' sport is an evil violation of nature's creative process.

It is a two-sentence poem, the wild promise of the first short one ("The south wind shouts to the rivers, / The rivers open their mouths") countered and denied in the long angry rush of the thirteen-line second sentence. It is an impressive technical achievement. The verse is free but the accentual rhythms are emphatic and move in nervous variation with an effect almost Miltonic. The animistic imagery makes all nature seem humanly alive--the wind shouts, "the rivers open their mouths for the salmon" (like the whale for Jonah), the sundown is angry; while the anglers, dark and silent, are identified with stone and materialism, the vital fish to them only "live bullion

"Salmon Fishing" is a kind of brutal elegy, a savage lament for death.

(Comparison with Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea is invited.)

"Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter"

by John Crowe Ransom*

(For text of poem, see Selected Poems by John Crowe Ransom; Alfred Knopf, New York, 1963; p. 11.)

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* John Crowe Ransom (1888-) is a native of Tennessee who was educated at Vanderbilt University and spent many years there teaching and writing. He subsequently taught at Kenyon College where he was founder and editor of the Kenyon Review. His name is associated with such prominent Southern writers as Allen Tate and Robert Penn Warren. He has published much poetry and criticism; students wishing to read more of his work might begin with the representative volume, Poems and Essays (1955).

In contrast to the elevated, intensely emotional things which are often said on such occasions, Ransom's verses on the death of a child seem comparatively simple and restrained. The student may, in fact, be helped to recognize the modesty of Ransom's poem by considering the many traditional "elegiac" efforts that are ignored here--the elaborate praise of the deceased, the assessment of the loss occasioned by death, the expression of grief, the "philosophic" deliberation on life and death and immortality.

Rejecting all such attempts, this poem is limited to three elements: (1) the animation and lightness of the child when she was alive; (2) the contrasting "brown study" of the child in death; (3) the response of the poet, the unspecified "we," to this contrast--a response, moreover, rather unconventionally represented as a dispassionate "astonishment" and "vexation." All three of these elements are present in the first stanza, which forms, as it were, a "topic sentence," presenting the basic and final facts to which very little of substance is subsequently added.

Any or all of these three elements might have been developed in the ensuing stanzas. As it is, Ransom chooses the first ot them--the tireless lightness of the living girl, as she appeared to the poet-observer in his "high window"--to pursue in the second, third, and fourth stanzas. The dead child and bewildered mourners are temporarily neglected as the image of the living child is recovered; the poet seems to "surrender" to the memory of the high-spirited little girl and her warfare against the geese. The image is initially recovered in an adult tone of affectionate condescension, signalled by the mock-heroic language of warfare in the second stanza, but is developed with a spirit of almost childish delight in the girl's mischief and the imagined responses of the aroused geese.

From this totally engaging recollection the final stanza recalls us to the reality of death. The vision of the playful, green-and-white world of the noontime meadow is, in truth, "sternly stopped" by the tolling bells and the stiff, lifeless figure in its "brown study." But though this stanza returns us to the dead child, it uses none of the language of grief or pity or terror. We are "stopped"; we are "vexed"; the dead girl is "primly propped." But there is no need for more elaborate emotional language. In the development of his contrasting imagery, the poet has superbly communicated the exuberant beauty of child-life and the heartbreaking stillness of child-death.

Prosody and syntax underscore the structure of the poem. Its technical characteristics do not thrust themselves on our attention, to be sure. Rhymes and half-rhymes are unobtrusive; rhythms and line lengths are irregular but inconspicuously so, and the student may properly find these qualities contributing to an unaffected, conversational tone. But he should also note a diversity within the five four-line stanzas which reflects and enforces the development of the poet's response. The first stanza sets a superficial pattern for the succeeding ones: three relatively lengthy and irregular lines (although each has four principal stresses) are succeeded by a short, regular line to terminate the sentence with clear finality. The following stanzas, however, despite their apparent resemblance to the first, lack its compact, self-contained character. After a complete sentence which occupies the first line of the second stanza, a single long and elaborate sentence "runs on" between lines and the stanzas themselves, assuming increasing complexity both of syntax and meter (as in the increasing caesuras) and concluding at a considerable distance from where it began. Compactness and order tend to succumb, as do the poet's thoughts, to the remembered image of the girl and the geese. And in the final stanza, as we are recalled to a ritual, dutiful reality, the stanza again assumes compactness and relative regularity.

There are subtler ways in which Ransom makes clear a kind of conflict between the enchanting memory of the living child and the fact of her death --a fact which, as an elegiac poet, he must confront. To cite an example, many students will probably note, as specimens of alliteration, the phrases "sternly stopped" and "primly propped" in the final stanza. They may properly point out that these are peremptory and rather unlovely sounds, lending an air of stiffness and finality to the conclusion of the poem. Beyond this, however, it may be noted that the sounds are singularly conspicuous; they have an air of transparent artificiality, calling attention to themselves as "devices" in a way that is strikingly at odds with the effortless grace of the preceding stanzas. It is as if the poet, having yielded to the purely delightful memories of the living girl, is ultimately returned to his traditional role, the confrontation of death and the need for a patently elegiac "performance." And thus we become conscious not only of the girl, living and dead, and of the emotions produced by her death, but of the poet, struggling both with his grief and with the art through which that grief must be expressed--with the elegiac task itself. And we become aware of the poem, as with most great elegies, not merely as a composition but as a difficult poetic act--an anguished but artful gesture of sorrow and love and resignation.

"The Three Companions"

by W. H. Auden*

(For text of poem, see Selected Poetry of W. H. Auden; Modern Library, Random House, New York, 1958; p. 17)

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*Wystan Hugh Auden (1907-   ) was born and educated in England but, after much foreign travel (including service with the Loyalists in Spain in 1937), has been a citizen of the United States for many years. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1948 and has published numerous volumes of verse as well as several verse-plays and operas. His more recent work is well represented by the volume Homage to Clio (1960).

The initial response of many students to Auden's poem is likely to involve recognition of its ballad-like qualities. The question which forms the opening line, the repeated warnings of dangers which a traveler can anticipate, the division into quatrains rhyming a-b-a-b-, the apparently quite uncomplicated imagery of terror, and the relatively abrupt beginning and ending--all of these are features which can properly be associated with many folk-ballads. Yet it should soon be perceived that the effect of the poem is not produced, like that of most ballads, largely by narrative, and that the poet, in deliberately suppressing particulars of character and place and event, seems to be addressing himself to more general questions.

"Character" indeed may lead more deeply into the poem, especially if we consider the pronouns "he" and "them" in the final line. For this line should invite us to see the poem as a kind of dialogue, involving, on the one hand, the single character who is succeedingly characterized as "rider," "farer," and "hearer," and, on the other hand, the three timorous figures who are called "reader," "fearer," and "horror." Three "warning" questions (and they are all put in interrogative form are presented by the three different characters, to be rejected seriatim, aptly and disdainfully by reader-farer-rider in the last stanza. It is the distinctions between the warnings that represent the varied "faces of fear" and provide the poem with its complexity, movement, and psychological interest.

The initial encounter between "reader" and "rider" suggests a contrast between the sedentary and vicarious life and one of action; reading has apparently produced a morbidly "literary" infernal vision, to which the adventurous soul can only respond, as he does in the last stanza, with contemptuous dismissal. "Fearer" is somewhat more realistic. The journey to him is a tangible actuality, but he views with alarm its genuine hazards and the moment when the reassuring stone beneath one's feet yields to grass. But it is, of course, precisely this kind of experience that "farer" seeks and which only he can enjoy. In the third encounter, the adventurer is called "hearer"--a somewhat ambigous title; it has been suggested that he is one who hears without distortion the sounds of the world about him, or, again, that his ears are attuned to the call of action or the challenge of life. There is, in any case, little doubt about "horror," whose sick and childish terrors have no foundation either in fact or systematic fancy, and whose morbid warnings are savagely turned on himself.

The "warnings," thus proceed from diversified sources: the elaborate fantasies of a gloomy literary imagination, authentic distaste for the real essence of adventure, and puerile, neurotic terror. Whether these doubts represent the reasons why various kind of people reject the challenges of life or whether they are to be read as a kind of "internal" dialogue in which the adventurous man is assailed by, and overcomes, his own fears is a question that cannot be firmly answered. The important point is that the grounds of fear and withdrawal emerge clearly in their diversity and are rejected with a uniform tone of uncomplicated finality.

Yet the poem is more than a dialogue on fear; it is a song, celebrating the life of action and inquiry and fiercely denying all forms of timidity. Within a simple stanza form and with spare, sometimes elliptical imagery, Auden has produced a robust and spirited verse, whose rhythms, while varied, never threaten to "bog down" but catch up even the fearful imaginings in a headlong tempo. Much of this effect is produced by the "galloping" anapests which are the dominant foot; some of it is achieved by the rhyme scheme and alternate feminine and masculine endings which carry us on from the first to the second half of each stanza. Auden has also richly exploited his gift for diversified repetition of sounds--a technique which, as here, can be employed to make lines more easily readable and thus increase the sense of tempo. The first stanza alone offers abundant specimens of full or approximate alliteration and of internal rhyme or near-rhyme.

These qualities produce a zest and movement which deserves more than secondary consideration. For the substance of the poem is largely devoted to the representation of fear and almost nothing positive is said about the pleasures of adventurous encounter with the unknown. Yet, largely because of the musical quality of the verse, the poem seems almost literally to be singing fear away and, in the last analysis, to be hymning for us the fierce joys of fearlessness.

"Naming of Parts"

by Henry Reed*

(For text of poem, see Immortal Poems of the English Language, ed. by Oscar Williams; Washington Square Press, New York, 1965; pp. 604-605.)

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*Henry Reed (1914 -) is an Englishman, a war veteran, a journalist and broadcasting script-writer. "Naming of Parts" is the first selection in a longer set of poems called "Lessons of the War" which appears in Reed's book, A Map of Verona (1947).

The "suite" of poems from which "Naming of Parts" has been selected is called "Lessons of the War" and this poem itself derives from a wartime "lesson" familiar to most Army veterans, the lecture-demonstration on the parts and functioning of the rifle. Reed is not the only citizen-soldier who has found the germ of poetry in the routinized, sometimes absurd procedures of military instruction, but he has joined the words of the instructor with the silent reflections of one of the soldier "students" and imposed upon them a relatively formal poetic pattern. In its technical structure the poem is, indeed, more traditionally formal than its materials would suggest; sources of this formal quality can be found in a predominantly dactylic foot (reminiscent of classical epic meter) and the uniformity of the five stanzas, each of which ends with a shorter line as a sort of "refrain."

The dramatic movement within each stanza is likewise comparatively uniform. In every instance the instructor's words begin the stanza, shifting unobtrusively to the reflections of the soldier-poet. These reflections, however, are not random but have been "triggered"--through associations and even puns (i.e., "easing the Spring")--by the words of the instructor.

As the mechanical lecture grinds on, it produces in the soldier-listener a highly inappropriate response, the emerging image of a exquisite garden in which the only activity is the delightful movement of the bees. Such an interplay could be exploited for various effects, including humorous ones --and, in fact, there are clearly comic moments in which the unconscious humor of the instructor's statements ("which in your case you have not got" or "do not let me see anyone using his finger") is underscored by their reappearance in the lyrical context of the garden-vision.

But there is more to the poem than the repeated see-saws between an inflexible reality and an enchantingly irrelevant fantasy. The mind which thus turns the training lecture to its own uses is more than a witty one; it is the mind of a man who senses his own remoteness both from the immediate military "business at hand" and from the peace of the distant, imagined garden. The final stanza makes this very clear. Phrases and images of preceding stanzas are brought together in a kind of bitter amalgam and the "point of balance" (a term actually applicable to the rifle but not previously introduced in the poem) is seen as that which "we have not got." From the certain, systematic procedure of "naming of parts" the mind of the soldier has seized on those phrases which stress the unseen, the unpossessed, and has thus reflected its own sense of alienation, uncertainty, and longing for beauty.

Moreover, both the lecture and the vision it unexpectedly produces are of a particular kind. The lecture deals with the rifle; the "easy" operations which are so matter-of-factly described are, inescapably, the techniques of killing. And the garden is not "any" garden but (as its restraint and fragility and such plants as "japonica" and "almond-blossom" suggest) an oriental garden--and most probably, a Japanese garden. We should not, however, rush to assert that the "basic situation" of the poem is that of a man being trained to destroy a civilization in which he finds much to admire. Indeed, the poet has been at pains to discourage such a heavy-handed interpretation. If the soldier's circumstances have been engendered by the cosmic tragedy of war, the poem itself is neither an angry protest nor a tragic cry. It is dominated, instead, by a sense of imagined beauty and the wry recognition of an absurd, unlovely reality.

"Anyone Lived In a Pretty How Town"

by E. E. Cummings *

(For text of poem, see Poems 1923-1954 by E. E. Cummings; Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York)

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*E. E. Cummings (1894-1962) was a Massachusetts-born poet, novelist, and painter (whose name was generally printed as "e e cummings" in the original publications of his works). A graduate of Harvard, he drove an ambulance in France during World War I, studied painting in Paris, but spent most of his later life in New York City. His poems have appeared in a collected edition; his best-known novel is probably his early work, The Enormous Room (1922).

There are a number of facts about this poem on which those readers who refuse to be distracted by its unconventional features can probably agree. It is a poem about the life, love, and death of the figure whom the poet calls "anyone." It is a poem about the rhythms of existence --the cycles of seasons and elements, sleeping and waking, reaping and sowing, coming and going. It is a poem about the universal impersonality which is the sum of all our intensely personal preoccupations. It is a poem about love and love-in-death, submerged in--but not eliminated by--the endless rhythm of the world.

Much of the poem is so clear that its unconventional qualities should not be seen as puzzling enigmas or tricks but as "calculated ambiguities" which, whether resolved or unresolved, enrich the fundamental effects of the verse. The student, however, should not merely write-off as deliberately ambiguous whatever puzzles him but should be encouraged to note a variety of ways in which such elements serve the poet's purposes.

There are, for instance, those terms or phrases which are deliberately vague because they seek to suggest what is indeed very general and because explicit language would destroy this effect. (More precise language might also reduce the poem to the banal life-story which, in its syntax and order of events and some of its phrasing, it often approaches but of which, precisely because of its unexpected language, it remains a kind of parody.) The opening line offers an instance of this. There is the vagueness of the word "pretty," which can be either an adjective (i.e., "pleasing" or "attractive")or an adverb (i.e., "somewhat"). And the adverb "how" is not merely ambiguous but, in the wild range of possible meaning it may convey, very close to meaningless. Taken by itself, the line suggests that the town is not to be sharply characterized, except by a possible connotation of attractiveness. Taken, as it must be, in conjunction with the ensuing line about the bells, the line clearly points to a meaning more agreeable than otherwise and even the mysterious "how" can be assumed to represent an amiable quality.

From another kind of ambiguity it is possible to draw more explicit inferences. "He sang his didn't he danced his did" is an example, for here the life of "anyone" is represented as a kind of rhythmical performance Singing and dancing are much the same kind of activity, but they are indifferently applied to antithetical concepts--"did" and "didn't," affirmative and negative. "Anyone's" life is thus represented as a kind of rhythmic, carefree or unreflective activity, extending to the whole scale of his experience. Comparable inferences can be drawn from a phrase like "tree by leaf," in which the growth of love is suggested by a figure which is not the equivalent of "bit by bit" but of "whole by part."

There are other kinds of ambiguity which, despite their appearance of vagueness or confusion, contrive to embrace an extraordinary richness of imagery. "With up so many floating bells down" not only establishes one of the poem's repeated rhythms (up and down) but suggests the lightness of the bells, the floating descent of their music, the pleasant, dispassionate rhythmic sounds which pervade the town and its people's lives. And in the account of death and interment (lines 24-32), the student should be able to discover that, from the initial "side by side" image, there is developed ("little by little," etc.) a powerful though restrained account of the physical minuteness, the finality, the completeness of death and the depth, permanence, and wholeness of the particular kind of immortality with which the poem is concerned.

At some point it may be profitable to inquire what purpose is served by the names "anyone" and "noone" and why some less unorthodox way of designating the poem's "hero" and his beloved might not have been used. The student may well be tempted to equate "anyone" with "Everyman," and to suggest that this is the story of all mankind. It may, however, be argued that the poem is not necessarily a parable, an attempt to explain the general character of life. "Anyone's" anonymity is more important than his universality. This is a life-story, told in the context of a rhythmic and ultimately unchanging universe, but it is a single-life story nonetheless. And "noone" should probably be viewed, paradoxically, as a real person as well--"no one," to be sure, in the eyes of the someones and everyones and all save a few children, but capable of loving and being loved, grieving, dying, and surviving in the eternal cycle.

As is so often true of Cummings' poems, the absence of conventional punctuation is abundantly compensated by very clear syntax and a rhythmic structure so powerful that there is little doubt where emphases should fall. Although there is diversity in line-lengths, each individual line has its own marked rhythms and although the number of unstressed syllables varies widely, each line contains four vigorous stresses. The result is itself a kind of bell-song, with four basic striking tones, sometimes brought together in a uniform tolling, at other times interspersed and lightened with clusters of unstressed syllables.

And perhaps it is as a song that the poem most vigorously appeals to us. For the poet is striving neither to persuade us nor to offer paraphraseable, commonsense wisdom; he is, rather, asking that we share in his mood, his vision, and his music.

spelling

"Dolar"

by Theodore Roethke[*]

(For text of poem, see Words for the Wind; Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1958; p. 55.)

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[*] Theodore Roethke (1908-1963) was a native of Michigan who taught English at several American colleges and universities and was on the faculty of the University of Washington from 1943 until the time of his death. His poetry has been widely published and re-published. An interesting collection of his prose can be found in On the Poet and His Craft (1965).

Roethke's poem is one whose "meaning" is readily grasped, yet whose tone and effect are open to considerable debate. Even before the poet makes explicit the grounds for his distress, we recognize that he is grieved by the spectacle of neatly multiplied, colorless, lifeless, though "useful" objects. Moreover, with the conclusion of his initial long sentence (line 8), he makes clear his belief that what is true of such objects is also true of the lives he associates with them. In the second, concluding sentence, he elaborates this view, describing the process by which institutional dust gradually coats the "duplicate gray standard faces" of those who work in the world of "multigraph, paper-clip, comma."

The spectacle of drab human uniformity can be profoundly depressing and can lead to disturbing speculations about the spiritual and intellectual poverty of which it is the outward manifestation. The "problem of conformity' is sufficiently discussed in our time so that the students may be led to consider the significance of the charges which Roethke brings to bear upon aspects of contemporary life. The students may also find disturbing irony in the fact that the symbols of endless multiplication are largely instruments of "communication"--that precisely that activity which should involve the greatest liveliness and individuality, the production of language, is here reduced to lifeless mechanism.

But despite the gravity of the questions implicit in the poem, there are those who refuse to take it with complete seriousness. Certainly, if the juxtaposition of the formal and gloomy with the trivial tends toward a comic effect, Roethke comes at times quite close to humorous complaint rather than sorrow or serious protest. The term "dolor" itself is, as the dictionary suggests, largely "poetic." The adjectives and abstract nouns ("inexorable sadness," "misery," "desolation," "unalterable pathos") are all associated with manifestly human emotions, bordering, at least, on the tragic. The measured, lengthy, dominantly dactylic lines are signals of an almost exaggerated solemnity. Yet the apparatus of deep seriousness is here attached to the most commonplace inanimate objects and trivial settings, with a result that approaches the ludicrously paradoxical.

It may, however, be argued that Roethke's achievement in the poem lies precisely in his resolution of this paradox--that he "rescues" his work from the ridiculous by revealing how the emotions with which he has invested these objects are not false or silly but grave and genuine. For when living men and women assume the "duplicate gray standard" appearance of office supplies, the effect is, in truth, profoundly melancholy.

Here the student is encountering one important use of symbol. For often a symbol itself is inherently devoid of meaning or emotional content, assuming its power only because there are such qualities in the phenomenon which it resembles or is chosen to represent neatly stacked pencils are intrinsically neither sad or comic; but when we detect their lifeless uniformity in the human beings who use them, the pencils themselves become invested with some of the sadness produced by the comparison.

This exploitation of symbol lends authenticity to Roethke's originally rather extravagant response to the paraphernalia of the business world. The poem falls short of the tragic--it lacks the magnitude of tragedy, for one thing--but as a study in drabness, it produces an effect of unrelieved melancholy--for which "dolor" is as good a word as any.

"Night Crow"

by Theodore Roethke

(For text of poem, see Words for the Wind; Doubleday, Garden City, New York, 1958; p. 58)

Roethke's short poem moves in a way which is very frequently found in more traditional verse, particularly that of the Romantic poets. A single "real" spectable in external nature has the power to produce an "internal" imaginary or intellectual experience in the poet-beholder. Here, too, as in many similar poems, the "actual" experience lacks much of the magnitude and mystery of the imagined experience or vision which it stimulates; the "real" crow is merely clumsy, flapping into the air from a dead tree.

From this stimulus, the beholder moves not only to a vision of another huge bird but, as it were, to a consciousness of the geography of his own mind, in which the "gulfs" of dream yield to a "moonless black" in the depths of the brain. There are no hints here of "hidden meanings": the poem is sufficiently mysterious and provocative as it stands. For the vision does not proceed from the "real" experience by any discernible laws of logic or analogy or cause-and-effect. A single, rather ordinary spectacle has produced a novel self-consciousness, a moving awareness of the depths and darkness of the human mind, a suggestion that they are somehow penetrable, although mystically and rarely.

The poem has the deliberate appearance of a fragment, the suggestion ("when I saw that clumsy crow") that it has been snatched from the midst of a conversational account. Yet there is no sense of incompleteness; the rhymed couplet which concludes the poem, its syntactical unity, the implied final disappearance of the imaginary bird--all produce a poem which is a single whole, but which sets the imagination to work.

POEMS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Following are six more twentieth-century poems which may be used in lieu of some of those included earlier or assigned as extra reading for students of higher aptitude. No explications have been provided for these poems, in the belief that teachers may want to approach them from their own critical point of view or allow students to do so.

"The Man of the House"

by David Wagoner

(For text of poem, see Poems by David Wagoner, 1959.)

"The Fruit of the Tree"

by David Wagoner

(For text of poem, see The New Yorker Magazine,
August 22, 1964)

"Fall Wind"

by William Stafford

(For text of poem, see Traveling Through the Dark;
Harper and Row, New York, 1962; p. 70)

"Lore"

by William Stafford

(For text of poem, see West of Your City by William Stafford; Talisman Press, Los Gatos, California, 1960)

"The Great Blue Heron"

by Carolyn Kizer

(For text of poem, see The Ungrateful Garden by Carolyn Kizer; Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1961; pp. 69-70.)

"Sale"

by Josephine Miles

(For text of poem, see Poems--1930-1960 by Josephine Miles; Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1960; p. 78.)

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Teacher Version

I. Purpose of the unit

In a world dominated by science, it seems only fitting that high school students should be given some examples of the scientific essay. Often science courses give the student a sense of many details to be learned but little of the meaning given to these details by the synthesizing mind. Perhaps these essays do something to suggest that the gap between the lab and the reflective human being can be bridged. In selecting them, we have tried to avoid two extremes: on the one hand, the scientific essay that is too technical for the layman; on the other hand, the essay that leaves the language of science behind in a gush of vague sentimentality.

Besides scientific prose, we have included poems that also record human responses to the world of nature. Thus materials are provided to illustrate similarities and differences between scientific and poetic observation. The poems and prose are arranged in groups which roughly represent kinds of physical characteristics, such as color and form, size and space, motion and change, with a concluding section on some aspects of man's relation to nature. Of course there is a good deal of overlapping in these sections, but the divisions have at least the value of breaking the unit into sections suitable for teaching purposes. Finally, in the exercises at the end of the unit, there will be room for generalizations about science and poetry as two modes of understanding experience.

To justify the combination of poetry and science in this unit, it is enough to point to their common concern with the interpretation of experience. When Wordsworth described poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science," he had a vision of the poet and scientist working side by side. Perhaps he was ahead of his times. Certainly today more and more scientists willingly acknowledge their kinship with artists. For example, in Scientific American, September, 1958, J. Bronowski writes that Leonardo da Vinci" gave science what it most needed, the artist's sense that the detail of nature is significant." Even more emphatic is L. L. Whyte, the English physicist, when he states: "Art and science are two fruits of one basic human faculty: the formative imagination. . . ." And he defines "formative imagination" as that "which selects or creates definite forms of ordering from the semi-chaos of nature and experience." For concrete evidence that poet and scientist can illuminate the work of one another, the German poet and scientist Goethe may be mentioned; and more recently, it is noteworthy that an English scientist, Desmond King-Hele, published in a single year, 1960, a book on Shelley and one on artificial satellites.

For everyone it is becoming increasingly important not to think of the scientist as a discoverer of truth and the poet as a purveyor of fictions. We now realize that man is too much involved in the world he observes ever to be sure that he is discovering ultimate reality. To quote Whyte again, "man selects what he observes and disturbs everything he measures." Considering that a scientist is speaking, we who are not scientists will do well to refrain from contrasting the scientist with the poet in terms of a simple antithesis between objective and subjective points of view. Rather, we must look for the different patterns of meaning that are inherent in different kinds of perception. Any assumption that the scientist alone perceives the "real" world must be discarded, for as Goethe noted, facts are facts only as long as the theory they represent is accepted. The scientist imposes one kind of order upon the universe, the poet another. To study these kinds of order will be the purpose of this unit.

Note: In this unit, answers have been suggested only for the more difficult questions.

Asimov's "Words of Science"

Exercises

1. Language is a living, growing thing. We are constantly adding new words and phrases, and expanding the meaning of old words and phrases. Whenever we look closely at words, we can agree with Asimov, who points out that a scientific vocabulary has grown up with our space adventures. See if you can make a list of some of the words with which Americans have grown familiar over the past decade, and now use casually in conversation. Can you discover how these new words came into being? Are any of them "coined" Greek and Roman words? Cite a number of examples, and expalin how each word originated.

2. Asimov points out in this essay that one important by-product of using a so-called "dead" language to create scientific terms has been the creation of an international scientific vocabulary. Can you find any scientific terms "coined" in the last decade that are used both in Russia and America?

I. COLOR AND FORM

Julian Huxley, "Life's Improbable Likenesses"

Study Questions

1. Many insects and birds have coloration that is attractive enough to the human eye to suggest the work of an artist. In this essay, what kind of purpose does the scientist see as governing the patterns which we admire on many birds and insects. Is this the kind of purpose that an artist has in painting a picture? -- Concealment to escape detection of enemies is one cause of the patterns on birds and insects. An artist, on the other hand, is not busy with biological survival when he paints a picture, unless we think of the cavemen artists who were using art as a kind of magic power over the animals that they hoped to kill for food.

2. Can you tell anything of the writer's attitude from his writing? Is this the coldness of the scientist who records what he sees but leaves his feelings out of the picture? In the fifth paragraph, for example, what does the adjective "astonishing" tell us about the writer's attitude? Find other clues in the essay and look particularly at the conclusion. --The writer is admiring perfection of form in nature which, although it springs from the need for biological survival, nevertheless suggests the kind of fitness of means to end that is characteristic of human art. This writer is not coldly detached but is observing almost like an art critic how wonderfully creatures adapt themselves through the use of color and pattern.

3. What seems to have induced this scientist to this minute observation of things in nature? Why go around examining insects and crabs? -- Simple wonder or curiosity seems to be the incentive to looking closely at the world of nature.

Exercises

1. Huxley has given us an interesting and logical explanation of why many mammals, birds, and kinds of marine life bear uncanny resemblances to other things. Try an experiment of your own. Go into the library and find a book about birds, fish, or insects that is lavishly illustrated. (They abound on the science shelves.) Turn slowly through, noting any unusual or interesting characteristics that you feel would serve as an example for Huxley's theory. Write down the name of the bird, animal, or insect, and describe the unusual shape or marking carefully.

2. Have you ever observed any unusual markings on birds or insects? Can you think how such markings may have helped them survive? If so, write a paragraph explaining your theory.

Robert Frost, "Fragmentary Blue"

Study Questions

1. What question is the poet asking? Does it differ at all from a question that a scientist might ask? -- The poet wonders why we are so attracted to little bits of blue on earth when the sky is a sheet of blue. A scientist, if he asked the question, would not be asking it in these terms. He would perhaps ask why the color blue appeals to the human eye, what there is about its wave length that makes it satisfying.

2. Is Frost talking about anything else besides the color blue? -- Heaven as distinct from earth, man's aspirations, his dreams as distinct from the material world he lives in. Blue becomes a symbol of a little bit of heaven that exists on earth in the shape of birds, butterflies, etc.

3. Does the use of the word "savants" imply any attitude toward scientists? -- A little mockery of the expert's view, in so far as it neglects the human view.

Exercise

We can readily see why Frost thinks of the color blue (as glimpsed here on earth in birds and flowers) as a symbol of a little bit of heaven. We associate other colors with various things, too. For example, green is thought of in connection with living things--we associate it with spring, budding trees, grass, even the smell of new-mown lawns. Can you think of other examples that will show how such associations have affected our feeling about colors? If so, write a short paragraph explaining why some colors carry certain connotations. (One way to find out will be to check your own reaction. Say the name of a color a few times to yourself and write down the things it calls to mind.)

Robert Frost, "Nothing Gold Can Stay"

Study Questions

1. Does gold in this poem mean more than a color? -- Yes, it is a symbol of something precious. For the scientific observer, "nature's first green" would be gold simply because this is the color of the immature leaf, but for the poet, the golden leaf is linked with all the precious, fleeting moments of life.

2. What is the Garden of Eden doing in this poem? How does this allusion support the poet's generalization? -- The Garden of Eden is the Golden Age; as a time of innocence, it could last only a moment. Obviously, the poet is extending the connotations of the word "gold" by alluding to a moral decline, as well as the physical decline that all nature is born to.

Magnus Pyke, "The Shape of Snow-Flakes" from "I'm from Missouri"

Study Questions

1. Why does the writer introduce his article by mentioning the man from Missouri? -- This is a neat way of motivating the account of scientific experiments and what they have shown.

2. Why has the writer called the minds of fish "pleistocene"? -- Reread Isaac Asimov's "Words of Science" at the first of this unit, noting especially his definition of "pleistocene," then discuss the question of whether scientists should use only "easy" words.

3. What is the scientist's main interest in the snowflakes? -- What it is that makes each one a perfect hexagon?

4. If scientists have their questions answered mainly by experiments performed scientifically, how do you think that poets find answers to their questions? Look back, for example, at Frosts's poem "Fragmentary Blue."

5. Do you think that the poet and the scientist are looking at the same world? Or could the poet be constructing a world from his imagination? Could the scientist also be constructing a world that seems to fit the facts of his imagination? Could the scientist also be constructing a world that seems to fit the facts of his experience? Could we say that two different kinds of experience are involved?

6. Do the words "rhythm" and "pattern" have anything in common? Could you invent a definition that would show what these things have in common, one represented by a time term, the other by a spatial term?

James E. McDonald, "The Shape of Raindrops", Scientific American, February, 1954, pp. 64-68.

Study Questions

1. What does the writer mean when he says that "the real picture" of the raindrop is "esthetically less satisfying than the teardrop fiction"? How does the contrast between art and scientific fact act as a device for presenting some scientific findings? -- The writer engages the reader's interest by beginning with something familiar to everyone and taken for granted; namely, the shape of raindrops in commercial art and cartoons. As a result of scientific experiments, the writer is able to show the reader that what he has taken for granted is a conventionalized depiction, not an accurate one by any means. But surprise is used to motivate the reader to follow the scientific study.

2. Why will cartoonists and commercial artists continue to represent raindrops as teardrops, rather than hamburger buns, in spite of scientific information that could affect their drawing?

3. What contrast is implied between the cleverness of the raindrop in "managing its own affairs" and its insignificance as it splatters down "on some dusty road at the beginning of an August thundershower"? Does this contrast seem to give the raindrop almost human qualities, and if so, why should the writer wish to humanize a raindrop? -- The scientist is impressed with the wonders of even the most insignificant natural occurrences; to emphasize the wonder of self-regulation, he has no choice but to attribute mind to the raindrop. A similar attitude can be noted in the selection describing the shape of snowflakes.

Exercise

The author points out that our common concept of the raindrop is entirely wrong. We have pictured it in our mind as similar to a teardrop because we commonly see it illustrated thus. Can you think of other scientific inaccuracies that we have grown to think of as accurate? (For example, we usually think of a star as being five-pointed. Is this accurate?) Select several of what you consider to be the best examples you can find and write a few paragraphs about your discoveries.

Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar"

Study Questions

1. What contrast does this poem make? Look at the first stanza and especially at the adjectives. -- The contrast between art and nature is emphasized in the roundness of the jar and the slovenliness of the wilderness.

2. What is the effect of the jar on the wilderness? -- It gives form to the formless wilderness by drawing it to a focus at the top of the hill.

3. Is this a very special jar? If so, why is it "gray and bare"? -- It is gray and bare in contrast to the living things, such as bird and bush. It is all shape, but this is the very reason that it commands the wilderness.

4. What rhymes can you find in the poem? What is their effect? -- The only real end rhyme occurs in the first two lines of the last stanza, where the effect is of a singing triumph, and not the less of a triumph because the jar is "gray and bare." Internal rhymes help perhaps to emphasize shape and interaction between the jar and the setting: "round" and "surround", "round" and "ground."

5. You have seen that snow flakes and rain drops have characteristic shapes; do you think that Stevens is justified in placing art (or a man-made object) in such emphatic contrast with nature?

6. Do you begin to see an interest that scientists and artists (including poets) have in common? How do they differ in their pursuit of this common interest? -- Both scientists and artists are interested in form; they differ

in that the scientist seeks to identify forms in nature; the artist, to create forms.

Exercise

You read Stevens "Anecdote of the Jar" in which a sharp contrast is drawn between the man-made world and nature. Man often tries to have the objects he creates blend with the world of nature. For instance, an architect is usually concerned with the problem of designing buildings and houses that blend into and become a part of the landscape. Yet there are always many examples to be found of how man has distorted nature. Often billboards blot out the view along our highways. Can you think of other ways that man has abused nature, or allowed his man-made structures to clash with nature?

Color and Form: Concluding Exercise

In the poems and essays you have just read, note how important a part description plays. Reread some of the descriptive passages carefully. Now try describing some objects yourself. You will need to observe whatever you are describing very carefully before beginning. Note the little things that might go unnoticed by a casual observer. Be sure to be accurate. Use one of the following or choose a similar topic:

- a garden snake
- a young colt
- a sparrow
- a cricket
- a small, nondescript dog
- a tall fir

II. SIZE AND SPACE

J. B. S. Haldane, "On Being the Right Size"

1. Is there anything in the first paragraph that links this selection to the theme of several selections in the preceding section? -- ". . . a large change in size inevitably carries with it a change of form."

2. Why does Haldane refer to pictures of giants in illustrated children's books? In what essay that you have already read does the writer make a similar point: that we are willing to accept inaccuracies of representation that the scientist must criticize in his role as scientist? -- "The Shape of Raindrops".

3. List the advantages and disadvantages of large size for a creature living in our world.

4. Does this writer show you the world from an angle different from the one you ordinarily see from? Consider, for example, the statement: "A mouse could not distinguish one human face from another six feet away."

Ben Jonson, "It is Not Growing Like a Tree" in Immortal Poems, p. 79.

Study Questions

1. By what standard is the poet judging size and length of life? Can you contrast this standard of judgment with that used by Haldane in the preceding selection? -- Whereas the scientist is mainly concerned with the efficiency of the organism, the poet here is concerned only with the beauty.

2. Is Jonson talking about anything besides a tree and a lily; is he using these as illustrations of something else? If so, what?

Eddington, "The Milky Way and Beyond"

Study Questions

1. Why has Eddington described the spiral nebulae as forming a flat coil "rather like a watch spring" and rotating "like a Catherine Wheel"? -- Scientists must explain the world as they see it in terms of the world that the rest of us are familiar with. Like poets, they have to use analogies to talk about their subject.

2. What is the effect on you as you read an account of distances and temperatures of stars? Does Eddington view these enormous numbers differently from the way you view them?

3. What contrast does Eddington draw in the first paragraph between the scientists' view of the Milky Way and the casual observer's view?

4. By the end of this selection, have you indeed come to regard the earth as a "tiny planet" and the universe as a "nightmare of immensity"? Perhaps you will be ready to sympathize with Walt Whitman in the following little poem:

When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

But if this poem suggests that poet and scientist have parted company, look back at Eddington's first paragraph and ask yourselves whether he, the scientist, is really incapable of feeling the beauty of the stars. Then turn to the next selection for further evidence that the science of astronomy has not ruled out poetry.

Exercise

[If you have students who are particularly interested in science, you might want to suggest the following exercise. We suggest you use it for top track students.]

In scientific prose--if it is really readable--the author is just as much interested in having us understand, visualize, and appreciate his facts as a writer of fiction is interested in having us become engrossed in the story he is telling. Therefore, in articles like "The Milky Way," the way a writer says something is part of what he says. In this essay an author has taken a great many difficult concepts and numbers so large as to be meaningless at first and made them all tremendously exciting. How has he accomplished this? Is he talking directly to the reader? Why? Try taking some facts and figures concerning some scientific subject (ask your science teacher to help you select a suitable one) and rewrite them, doing your best to retell them in a conversational tone.

Patrick Moore, "Legends of the Stars"

Study Questions

1. How do the names of the constellations link the imaginative view and the scientific view of the stars?

2. What is inaccurate about the term "constellation" as applied to a group of stars?

3. Is there any contrast between the names of the ancient groups of stars and the more modern groups? Why should there be this difference?

Exercises

1. You have probably read myths, either in school or by yourself--stories of gods and goddesses, of monsters and maidens. Are there any terms in this essay which you were already familiar with from reading myths? Make a list of the various mythological terms referred to in this unit. Are there any you need to know more about? Ask your librarian to help you find an available book on myths. Look up the terms you checked. If possible, observe the various constellations yourself. Then explain why you think the particular name fits or does not fit.

2. Man named the stars and constellations after various gods and goddesses drawing heavily on the myths of the Greeks and Romans. Today, man is still employing the same techniques . The Gemini space capsule carried two Americans aloft in 1965. Can you explain why such a name was appropriate for this flight? Can you find other such names that have been bestowed upon space flights, rockets, missiles, etc. ? Read about some of the more recent space flights and guided missiles in your library. Then write a few paragraphs showing how man has used mythology in the twentieth century to chart his course into space.

Robert Frost, "Desert Places"

Study Questions

1. You have seen scientists talking of one thing in terms of another; Eddington, for example, talks about the structure of atoms in terms of crinolines. Now you can observe how a poet also talks of one thing in terms of another. What is Frost talking about when he describes the deserted field; why does this field interest him enough to make him write a poem about it? At the same time, you should consider the radical difference between the way a scientist uses analogy (look this word up if you don't know it) and the way a poet uses it in a poem. -- Frost is creating an image which corresponds with his own state of mind. But the difference between his analogy and Eddington's, or any other scientist's, is that the poet's analogy is not incidental; he is not simply trying to communicate with the layman but is creating an image that is at the heart

of what he wants to say. It is not merely a reminder to the reader of past experience but the creation of new experience.

2. In the last stanza, the poet introduces a second image of a desert place. Could he have reversed the order of these two images, ending the poem with the empty field, or is there a good reason for the order of the images as they stand? -- Frost likes to begin with a moment of actual experience --the field, and himself in relation to the field. After that, his mind can make a momentary leap to consider the most absolute image of emptiness that the human mind can conceive--the interstellar spaces. But he ends the poem, as he began, with himself.

3. Is Frost's nightmare the same as Eddington's, do you think?

Exercise

Robert Frost tells us that lonely though space may be, he, too, has his "desert places." It is true that man has solved many of the problems in the realm of science during this century. His "outer" problems are coming under control. But other people as well as poets have noted that man's inner conflicts have continued to cause concern. The poet Shelley once noted in his Defense of Poetry that while man has enslaved nature he has remained a slave himself. It is the business of poetry, as he saw it, to free man from himself, so to speak. Can you think of some ways in which man remains enslaved, in spite of the advances of science in our century? Write a paragraph explaining your views.

III. MOTION AND CHANGE

Rachel Carson, "The Changing Year" in The Sea Around Us

Study Questions

1. How is our usual idea of the sea altered by what the scientist has to tell us?

2. For each season, what parallels does the writer draw between sea and land?

3. Is this essay what you expect of scientific writing? Does the writer's feeling for the beauties of nature interfere at all with the conveying of information, or is the style consistent with the *kind* of information that she wants to convey? -- Rachel Carson's feeling for the wonders of nature makes her want to stir her readers to a similar feeling; hence the information she conveys is selected in accordance with a plan that is determined by feeling. By contrast, Eddington's plan is more determined by logic, although he is far from being the coldly objective scientist.

4. Near the end of the essay, Rachel Carson uses an expression that may puzzle you: she speaks of "unconscious purpose" in the "sluggish forms of the copepods hibernating on the bottom" of the sea. What does she mean by this expression? How much of nature does it include? Perhaps it will help you if you take into consideration what a poet and scientist, Goethe, said: "Life's purpose is life itself."

Exercises

1. Rachel Carson quotes Joseph Conrad's description of the winter sea. Can you find other descriptions of the sea during the changing seasons in novels, stories, and poems you have read recently? (Do not forget to look again at Hemingway's Old Man and the Sea, Steinbeck's The Pearl, and perhaps some of the poems you have studied earlier as well.) Write down some of the descriptions you like best, being careful to give the source. Share them with the rest of the class.

2. There is surely some spot of earth--or sea--with which you have been familiar for a long while. Without actually thinking about it, you have observed the seasons come and go, and you have seen the place change with the changing seasons. Select some place--perhaps, if you live there,the Willamette Valley or the Puget Sound area, or, if you know it well, some place on the Coast. If you have lived for awhile in Alaska, or Hawaii, or the Southwest, that may be your choice. Write a carefully detailed description of this region in the spring, in the summer, in the autumn, in the winter. Include such details as the changing skies, the wind, the rain, sunshine, vegetation, the sounds and movements and life of this region.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Spring"

As a poet's picture of spring, the first eight lines of this sonnet are included here for comparison with Rachel Carson's description of the seasons as they affect the sea.

Study Questions

1. Can you describe the point of view in this poem? Where does the poet seem to be as he looks at nature? What aspect of spring affects him most? -- The poet seems to be right in the midst of nature, surrounded on all sides by weeds, pear tree, etc. He does not stand outside nature and view it objectively but instead describes what it feels like to be alive on a day in spring. This quality of liveliness he finds in everything he sees.

2. Can you compare this picture of spring on the land with Rachel Carson's picture of spring on the sea? What similarities are there; what differences?

Exercises

1. In "Spring," Hopkins has used some unusual comparisons to transmit to us his feeling about spring. Reread the poem. If it were rewritten with all the comparisons removed, would it be as effective? Can you explain why?

2. Can you think of some unusual way to express your feeling about autumn? If not, look at a few poems about autumn; you might find a copy of Keats' "Ode to Autumn" and Robert Frost's poem, "After Apple Picking." Are any of the expressions especially striking? Why? Copy them down and read them to the class, explaining why you like them.

John Keats, "On the Grasshopper and the Cricket"

Study Questions

1. What does the poet mean by "the poetry of earth"? How does the word "poetry" come to stand for things other than verse on the page? -- Imagination can find poetic qualities anywhere.

2. Is the first line of the poem a statement of fact or of point of view?

3. How does the poet support the generalization at the beginning of the poem? -- Just as the grasshopper takes up the song of the birds as they fall silent, so the cricket in winter takes up the song of the grasshopper, and in turn the dreaming poet seems to hear the grasshopper's summer song in the voice of the winter cricket.

4. What contrast runs through the poem and helps to unify it? -- The contrast between warmth and coldness. By alternating these two, the

poem suggests the endless cycle of the seasons, as well as the endless cycle of song.

Exercise

Keats calls the sounds of the grasshopper and the cricket the poetry of the earth. Actually, the earth is filled with little musicians. If you go out into your yard late on a spring or summer evening, when everything is still and quiet, you will hear a number of small voices. Often you can track them down and identify the tiny musicians. You might try this and write an account of your experience, or, if you prefer, go into the library and see if you can find out exactly how a grasshopper or a cricket or a frog makes music. Try to write down the facts clearly and simply in a few paragraphs. Avoid too many scientific phrases and technical terms. Try to make your reader see the grasshopper and the cricket as small creatures with their own personalities.

E. G. F. Sauer, "Celestial Navigation by Birds", Scientific American, August, 1958, pp. 42-47.

Study Questions

1. What question provides the excuse for the article? Is there still an unanswered question at the end?

2. What is a planetarium? Why is it useful in testing the navigation of birds?

3. What evidence is there that birds possess a sense of time? Does it differ at all from a human being's sense of time?

4. Pick out some words that indicate the scientist's attitude to his experiments. Where do these words appear in the essay and for what reason do they appear only at particular points in the essay? -- Words such as "remarkable" and "wondrous" appear at the beginning and end of the essay because at these points the scientist is not merely reporting experiments but is commenting on his own reactions to his results.

Exercises

1. In an article entitled "A Sense of Wonder,"* Rachel Carson has described an interesting experiment concerning migratory birds, one which anyone could easily undertake. If, she tells us, we will find a place out of the wind--such as easily behind a house or shed--just after dark and stand still, listening intently, we will hear the cries of migratory birds. She says that such an experience never fails to bring to her the loneliness of great spaces. She adds that if the moon is full, and one has a small telescope, he can see the small travelers cross the moon, going from darkness into darkness. If it is at all possible, try this for yourself.

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*McCall's Magazine, June, 1965

Write a report explaining your findings.

Motion and Change: Concluding Exercise

Nothing in nature is changeless. We have read Carson's descriptions of the changing seasons, and of their effect on the sea. Other selections treated similar themes. Can you think of some of the things constantly changing according to a "pre-ordained" plan? There are the trees, for example, and there is moisture, which changes from clouds to rain. What else can you think of? Select one thing and describe in detail the changes which occur over a given period of time. Be careful to be accurate and detailed in your descriptions.

IV. MAN'S RELATION TO NATURE

Rachel Carson, "Earth's Green Mantle" in *The Silent Spring*

Study Questions

1. What does Rachel Carson mean by such expressions as "a web of life" and "a natural system in perfect balance"? -- In such expressions she is emphasizing the interdependence of man and the rest of nature.

2. What is the significance of the sage on the lands of the high western plains? Do you think that Rachel Carson has chosen this example for any particular reason? -- The value of this example lies in the apparent insignificance and lack of usefulness of the sage; it illustrates the humble, yet useful qualities of many things which man in his arrogance seeks to destroy.

3. Why would Rachel Carson at the end of her book attack the expression "control of nature" in these words: "The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man." What does she see as the proper relationship between man and nature?

4. Why does the writer advocate more use of plant-eating insects, instead of indiscriminate use of chemical weed killers?

5. Are there any words or expressions to indicate the writer's involvement with what she is reporting? Is this "dry" scientific writing? If it is not, then look for qualities in the writing that keep it from dryness. -- Not only such words as "tragic" and such obvious irony as "in the name of progress" reveal the writer's attitude, but also the kind of description she gives of nature: the loving care with which she describes the sage and the despair with which she describes man's devestation of nature.

Exercise

Rachel Carson uses man's destruction of sagebrush as an example of his unthinking and dangerously foolish attitude toward the preservation of nature's delicate balance between plants and land, and plants and animals. Recently there has been some discussion in the Northwest over the spraying of the roadsides. Some people feel that this causes needless destruction of wild life and destroys beneficial plants as well as harmful ones. They also point out that it leaves unsightly dead brush along the roads. Others feel it is an economical way to keep the roads neat. Think it over and decide how you feel about it. Plan to use some specific, concrete examples to back up your point of view. Then write a few paragraphs arguing your case--for or against.

Theodore Roethke, "Moss-Gathering"

Study Questions

1. Why does Roethke refer to the moss as "like an old-fashioned door-mat" and "carpets of green"? Do these expressions indicate any way of looking at the moss? Is there anything wrong with moving door-mats and carpets? -- The end of the poem reveals the inadequacy of viewing the moss simply as a carpet that can be moved. It is "flesh from the living planet."

2. How would you describe picking moss? Would you have noticed the "crumbling small hollow sticks on the underside", for example? Why are these useless things caught up in the roots of the moss? -- Again we have what seems the useless aspect of nature, but the roots of the moss are binding together the soil and all that is in it.

3. Does this description differ from a scientific description? Does the purpose of the description affect the choice of details? -- The scientist, even a scientist like Rachel Carson, would necessarily give a more objective view and hence be less concerned with the connotative effect of every word; for example, a piece of scientific writing would be unlikely to mention the detail of "all ten fingers." But more important, a scientist simply would not be describing what it feels like to gather moss. Even Rachel Carson is not focusing on feelings but on argument.

4. Could you formulate the question that the poet is trying to answer in this poem? -- Why do I feel guilty when I pick moss?

5. Is it fitting that the word "cemetery" occurs in the second line? -- Yes, this is a death that is being brought to nature.

6. Do the words "rhythm" and "natural order" have anything in common? Why should these things be respected? Do Roethke and Rachel Carson agree in their view of nature?

Exercise

Theodore Roethke speaks of his feeling that he had somehow broken the natural order of things by gathering the moss from the swamp, had indeed "committed against the whole scheme of things a desecration." Rachel Carson would have understood his sensitivity, even though his moss-gathering was indeed harmless. Think back over the past summer or so, and see if you can recall ever having noticed the wanton destruction of wild plant life. Have you ever watched large trees being uprooted to make way for a freeway? Tell about any incident you can recall, explaining the necessity or the purpose for such action, if there was one. Describe the process in detail and explain how you felt about it. Would you feel differently, after reading Miss Carson's essay and Theodore Roethke's poem?

Concluding Exercises

1. Imagine that you are a scientist: what question about the universe would you most like to have answered? You may even have some procedure in mind by which an answer could be obtained. Then take this same question and imagine that you are a poet who can find his own answer in his point of view and does not need a lab for testing his idea. For example, Robert Frost gives his kind of answer to such a question as why the leaves of early spring are golden for such a short time. A scientist would attribute this same phenomenon to the presence of carotin in the early leaves, whereas Frost simply observes, "Nothing gold can stay."

2. State as clearly as you can the purpose of comparisons in poetry and in scientific writing. Is there any important difference between these two uses of comparison?

3. Refer back to the Einstein quotation in the introduction to this unit; then discuss whether the scientist and the poet are likely to draw closer together in the future. What sort of factors might cause them to draw closer together or farther apart? You might want to take into consideration two pairs of selections that you have already read; for example, Eddington's "The Milky Way" and Whitman's "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," or Rachel Carson's "Earth's Green Mantle" and Roethke's "Moss-Gathering."

Suggestions, Exercises and Composition Topics

1. It is true that a scientist is often objective and a poet often subjective. It will perhaps help you to understand the differences in these approaches if you try writing a paragraph, first using an objective approach and then employing a subjective one. When you write your first paragraph remember to include all the recognizable, absolute facts possible. Be concrete. Never state an opinion. In the second paragraph tackle the same subject again. This time allow yourself to say how you feel about your subject. Be emotional if you like. When you finish, reread the two paragraphs. Which do you consider the better? Why? Which is the more accurate? Why? Is either untruthful? Why or why not?
Either use your own topics or choose one of these:

A boy kicking a kitten
A group of children jeering at a deaf-and-dumb child
A man preaching intolerance on a street corner

(If you select your own topic, select one that will allow you a strong reaction.)

2. Both scientists and poets have a common goal: they both seek to impose order upon a seemingly chaotic world. Sometimes different methods are employed. Why not try your hand at "looking" first with a poet's eye, and secondly from the point of view of a scientist, at the following list. Write two short paragraphs each for three of these.

a. A deep-red rose blooming by a fountain
b. A goat standing on a rock, overlooking the sea
c. The sky, filled with fast-moving white clouds
d. A small brown girl, standing beside a palm tree, clutching a shell in her hand
e. A sea-shell (perhaps you will recall the poem "The Chambered Nautilus")
f. A field of wheat, tall and green, ruffled by the breeze.

3. Shelley has sometimes been called a poet's poet, partly because of his deeply subjective approach. Yet he used scientific facts effectively in some of his poetry. Ask your librarian to help you find a copy of "The Cloud." Read it carefully and list some of the scientifically accurate information in it. Then select some of the statements you consider "pure poetry." How do they differ?

Write a paragraph explaining how Shelley used scientific facts to create "The Cloud." (Can you find any other poems that also employ scientific fact? If so, make a list to share with the class.)

4. Rachel Carson's scientific writing has a certain "poetic" warmth. It is far from a cold, objective approach. Look over the selection from her "The Sea Around Us" in this unit again. Note her descriptions, figures of speech, comments and conclusions.

Now in a short paragraph or two try to describe "The Woods Around Us" with the same careful attention to accuracy and the same feeling for beauty. How successful were you?

5. Read the various references to the sky in the poems in this unit. Now turn to some of the prose articles and look again at a statement or two about the heavens. What differences are apparent? How do you know? Write a paragraph or two explaining these differences.

6. Without an imagination to aid him in seeing beyond the present, a scientist would not be very effective. Look up something about several of the great scientific discoveries of the past (for example, Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood, Koch's discovery of the bacteria that cause tuberculosis, Pasteur's discovery of "pasteurization" of milk, Morse's invention of the telegraph or Edison's of the phonograph, etc.). Select one and write a paragraph showing how you feel an imaginative approach made the discovery possible.

7. This unit perhaps has helped you to see that a scientist and a poet are not so far apart after all, although there are differences. Select the prose article and the poem that you most enjoyed. Write a short paper in which you consider the following: What similarities do you see in the two? Differences? Which did you like best, the poem or the prose selection? What (if anything) did you dislike about either?